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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future will address the high teacher attrition rates. Sections discuss: "The Conventional Wisdom is Wrong" (it is important to focus on how to keep the good teachers who have been recruited, trained, and hired rather than ask how to find and prepare more teachers); "A Closer Look at the Numbers" (teacher turnover and attrition rates are high, the supply of teachers is generally adequate to meet the demand, and retirement is not as much of a contributing factor as some think); "Why Do We Appear to Have 'Shortages'?" (distribution inequities across regions, states, and districts and by field); "High Teacher Turnover Has Significant Costs" (putting a price tag on teacher turnover and the cost of high turnover for students); "How Can We Reduce High Teacher Turnover?" (salaries, working conditions, teacher preparation, and beginning teacher mentoring); "We Need Schools Designed for the 21st Century"; and "A Three Part Strategy" (organize schools for teaching and learning success, ensure that the teacher preparation system meets teaching requirements of the schools and learning needs of students, and develop and sustain professionally rewarding career paths for teachers). (SM)

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Unraveling the "Teacher Shortage" problem: Teacher Retention is the Key

A SYMPOSIUM

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and

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We Need To Balance Quality Teacher Preparation With Strong Retention Strategies

THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM IS WRONG

If we know that good teachers make a difference, why haven't we achieved high-quality teaching in every American classroom? The question is pointed. And for too long it has pointed in the wrong direction for an answer—toward a teacher shortage. The common perception, widely reported in the press, is that we just don't have enough teachers, especially good ones, to go around. But as often happens, the conventional wisdom turns out to be too conventional and too little wisdom. Our inability to support high-quality teaching in many of our schools is driven not by too few teachers coming in, but by too many going out, that is, by a staggering teacher turnover and attrition rate.

In general, the turnover rate among teachers is significantly higher than for other occupations.[1] The fact is, an alarming and unsustainable number of teachers are leaving teaching during their first few years of teaching. The *No Child Left Behind Act* has stimulated a national effort to find highly qualified teachers for every classroom. But no teacher supply strategy will ever keep our classrooms staffed with quality teachers if we do not reverse the debilitating rate of teacher attrition. We need to balance our efforts to prepare high quality teachers with strong strategies to support good teaching in our schools.

We Need To Ask a Better Question

When we ask, "How can we find and prepare more teachers?" we are focusing on the symptom instead of the problem. Or perhaps more accurately, the teacher "shortage" turns our to be just the visible side of a coin, whose underside is high attrition rates. By focusing on the visible symptom, we are distracting ourselves from addressing the underlying sources of the problem. We need to ask instead: "How do we get the good teachers we have recruited, trained, and hired to stay in their jobs?" A closer look at the numbers will help us understand the extent of the problem.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE NUMBERS

Teacher Turnover and Attrition Rates are High

The facts about the teacher retention problem speak for themselves. Turnover for teachers is significantly higher than for other occupations (see **Figure 1**).[1] Based on analysis of the most recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics for the 1999-2000 school year, it is estimated that almost a third of America's teachers leave the field sometime during their first three years of teaching, and almost half leave after five years (see **Figure 2**).[2] In many low-income communities and rural areas, the rates of attrition are even higher (see **Figure 3**). The attrition rate for those who enter through some "alternative" pathways can be as high as 60 percent.[3]

As a result of high attrition rates, despite their best efforts to recruit new teachers, many of our schools wind up with a net loss each year. In 1999, for example, our schools hired 232,000 teachers who had not been teaching the year before (i.e., new teachers hired who were not simply moving from one school to another). *But the schools lost more than 287,000 teachers who left for other occupations that year—55,000 more than they hired* (**see Table 1a**). When we see reports about how many teachers need to be hired this fall, we should be asking instead: "How many teachers left last spring? And why?"

As we explore the numbers and the accompanying figures, it is important to recognize that *the teacher retention problem crosses all communities and all sectors of education* (**see Figure 3**). Teacher attrition is highest in low-income communities, and in private schools, but suburban schools and affluent neighborhoods are not immune.

The retention problem plays itself out, to a greater or lesser extent, in every state. In Texas, which is one of the more dramatic cases, the problem was the focus of a recent report, which revealed that of the over 63,000 teaching positions in the state that needed to be filled in the 1998-99 school year, most of the openings (about 46,600, or 74 percent) were due to teachers leaving the profession prior to retirement. In comparison, 11,000 (17 percent) of these vacancies resulted from teacher retirements, and approximately 5,700 (9 percent) of these positions were created to accommodate increasing student enrollment. Crucially, many of the teachers who left the profession had not been teaching for very long. Between 1993 and 1996 as many as nineteen percent of the state's new teachers left the profession after their *first year.*[4]

The Supply of Teachers is Generally Adequate to Meet the Demand

The data on teacher attrition reveals a surprising fact: The United States produces more than enough teachers to meet its needs. (see **Table 1**). In general, the demand for teachers can be easily met by current sources of supply. As **Table 1a** shows, in 1999, 232,000 teachers were newly hired into the system, but only 85,000 were newly graduated from college (which is less than sixty percent of the new teacher graduates that year). Almost 80,000 of the new hires were re-entrants from the reserve pool of former

teachers returning to the classroom. And an additional 67,000, were either delayed entrants, who had prepared to teach in college but who pursued other activities before entering teaching, or other new entrants who were hired without prior teaching preparation or experience.[5]

The bottom line is, the nation's teacher preparation system has been responding vigorously to the increased demand for teachers over the last decade. For example between 1984 and 1998 the number of institutions preparing teachers increased from 1,287 to 1,354 and the annual number of graduates with Bachelors and Masters degrees jumped by over 50 percent to 230,000 by the 1999-2000 school year.[6] It is likely that some of those who received Masters degrees were already teaching, but we can be sure that the supply of new teachers was growing and more than adequate to meet the demand for first-time hires. For example, in the year 2000, the 603 institutions counted in the AACTE/NCATE joint data system reported 123,000 individuals who completed programs that led to initial teaching certification.[7] These institutions prepare about three-quarters of all teachers in training, so we can estimate that the number of newly prepared teachers that year would approach 160,000 (only 85,000 newly graduated teachers were hired the year before).

Furthermore, there is a large national reserve pool of individuals composed of those who have taught before, along with those who prepared but never entered teaching. In 1999, for example, 80,000 of these individuals returned to teaching from other pursuits. The most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau suggests there were more than 6 million individuals holding bachelor's degrees in education in 1993 (and many more with a major in another field plus a minor or credential in education or a masters degree). Thus, not counting approximately three million active teachers at that time, at least three million people in the U.S. were trained to teach but chose not to do so.[8] And add to this that over the years, thousands of teachers have entered the classroom through alternative pathways.[9]

Is Retirement a Factor?

Is retirement contributing to the high rate of teacher attrition? Not as much as we might think. The number of teachers leaving for *non-retirement* reasons is about three-to-one. It is the high non-retirement attrition rates that are fueling the teacher shortage.

It is true that a large number of teachers currently in the classroom were hired in the late 1960s and 1970s, and that they are now approaching retirement. It is also true that retirement rates have been increasing each year. But as **Table 1** shows, the number of retiring teachers is far below the total number of teachers hired in our schools from all sources. Over the next 10 years, about 700,000 teachers are projected to retire, accounting, for about 28 percent of the hiring needs during that period.[10]

The combined number of new entrants and re-entrants greatly exceeds the retirement rate. Even without the reserve pool reentrants, our teacher-preparation system could easily accommodate the retirement rate.

WHY DO WE APPEAR TO HAVE "SHORTAGES?"

If the United States has a sufficient number of individuals prepared for teaching, why are so many schools having difficulty staffing their classrooms, and why are there so many under-qualified teachers in America's schools – especially in the cities?

The high demand for teachers is not being driven by an undersupply of entering teachers, but by an excessive demand for teacher replacements that is driven by staggering teacher turnover. The data portray "a revolving door occupation with relatively high flows in, through, and out of schools" [11] (see **Figures 4 and 5**).

Distribution Inequities Across Regions, States, and Districts

The shortage problem may better be understood as a problem of teacher attraction, distribution, and retention. For the most part, the "shortages" that exist are shortages of people willing to work at the salaries and under the working conditions offered in specific locations. While there appear to be shortfalls in some states and districts, there are often surpluses in others, even when they are in close proximity to each other. The American Association of Employment in Education (AAEE, 1997) reports surpluses of teachers in most fields in the Northwest, Rocky Mountains, Northeast, and most Middle Atlantic states alongside shortages of teachers in many fields in Alaska, the West, and the South. In general, states that offer higher salaries in conjunction with policies that are more supportive of education and teaching, and states that have a greater number of teacher preparing institutions, have had fewer problems hiring teachers. Within states, most wealthy districts have surpluses of teachers while poorer districts that offer lower salaries and less attractive working conditions have difficulty hiring. Hiring problems are most common in inner cities and in the rapidly growing South and West.

At the local level, many qualified teachers do not find their way into jobs in the districts where they are most needed. The best-qualified teachers are typically recruited to better-funded districts with high levels of support. Teachers who have options want to work in schools that pay them adequately and support their efforts well. Increasing teacher production will not solve the problems of high turnover and attrition that fuel chronic "shortages" in disadvantaged schools where salaries are too low and working conditions are unacceptable.

In some states and districts the problem is aggravated by antiquated hiring procedures. The Commission has found that apparent shortages, and the hiring of under-qualified teachers, in many communities was less a function of labor market shortages than it was of cumbersome hiring procedures that prevent efficient and timely hiring and chase away good candidates. Similarly, many states enforce redundant requirements for fully qualified and credentialed candidates from other states, making it difficult for them to enter the local teaching force. Other barriers include late budget decisions on the part of state and local governments and teacher transfer provisions that push new hiring

decisions into August or September, lack of pension portability across states, and loss of salary credit for teachers who move.

Apparent shortfalls also are a function of distribution problems that result from federal policies that still treat teaching as an ad hoc local enterprise. At the national level there are few policies aimed at luring prospective teachers from fields and locations with oversupplies into those that are increasingly hard to staff. Unlike medicine, where the federal government helps to offset shortages by funding needed training slots in medical schools and scholarships for candidates in shortage fields, there is no current national policy to help manage the labor force in teaching. Policies that helped to ameliorate teacher shortages in the 1960s and 1970s were rescinded in the early 1980s and have yet to be replaced.

Some states have a large number of teacher education institutions and regularly produce more teachers than they can hire, while others have little infrastructure for preparing teachers and may not have developed the aggressive recruitment strategies or reciprocity arrangements they need to accept licenses awarded in other states. Some states still prepare relatively few teachers, despite the fact that they have rapidly growing student enrollments. By the year 2007, for example, enrollments are projected to increase by more than 20% in California and Nevada while enrollment declines are anticipated in most parts of the Northeast and Midwest.

Inadequate national and regional information about vacancies, lack of license reciprocity, and inadequate incentives for recruiting teachers to high-demand locations all contribute to the problems of getting teachers from where they are prepared to where they are needed.

Distribution Inequities by Field

Apparent teacher shortages are particularly severe in some fields. The data suggest, for example, that there are too few candidates to meet the demand for teachers in fields like mathematics, science, and special education. Subject specific shortages are likely to be worse in states that have not enacted targeted programs and incentives to recruit and prepare teachers in these fields. Federal incentives such as scholarships and loan forgiveness to steer prospective teachers into these fields are inadequate.

But, as **Figure 6** shows, it is important to recognize that teacher attrition in these fields is especially high. *Attrition rates for special education, mathematics, and science are approaching twenty percent a year* – the attrition rates in these fields are more than twice the rates for social studies teachers for example. Some states are making inroads on these field specific shortages by creating significant new recruitment and preparation program and by offering substantial subsidies in the form of service scholarships and forgivable loans. But, to realize the full benefit of their targeted investments in high need teacher preparation and supply, those states would be well advised to buttress their efforts with initiatives to reduce the exceptionally high attrition rates in these fields.

In short, continued high turnover rates and the chronic attrition of beginning teachers create a constant and ongoing annual pressure for hiring. In spite of what is, in fact, a surplus of potentially available teachers, an apparent shortage of fully qualified teachers choosing to teach continues to plague our nation's schools and classrooms. The uphill climb to staff our schools with qualified teachers is made that much steeper if teachers leave in large numbers in the face of difficult conditions and few supports.

HIGH TEACHER TURNOVER HAS SIGNIFICANT COSTS

It is time to balance our efforts to recruit and prepare high quality teachers with strong teacher retention strategies. We can no longer afford to offset high attrition rates by simply increasing the supply of replacements. The misperception that teacher shortages are the primary problem has serious consequences: It is driving poor policy decisions.

Putting a Price Tag on Teacher Turnover

Teacher turnover is expensive. For the 1999-2000 school year, our schools hired 534,861 teachers, but they lost as many as they hired – by the end of the year, 539,778 had left their classrooms. As **Figure 4** shows, almost a third of the teachers during that year were in transition. They were either going through the process of entering a new school with new colleagues and students, or they were at various stages of leaving their schools. This churning staff turnover keeps school administrators scrambling to find replacements, and in too many cases quality teaching is compromised in an effort to find a sufficient number of warm bodies to staff the classrooms. In the wake of this turmoil, student achievement declines.

We can, and should, put a price tag on the cost of turnover. To begin with, a realistic assessment of high turnover would suggest that a huge public investment in higher education tuition and tax support for teacher preparation is being undercut through chronic inattention to school conditions that could be changed to improve retention and promote quality teaching and learning.

We should also put a price tag on the cost of turnover at the school district level. There is evidence to suggest that the costs of replacing almost 16 percent of our teachers, *every year,* in this revolving door profession are astronomical. A recent study in Texas revealed that the state's annual turnover rate of 15.5 percent of all teachers, which includes a 40 percent rate for teachers in their first three years, costs a "conservative" $329 million a year. If the organizational costs of termination, substitutes, learning curve loss, and new training are included, then the price tag could go as high as $2.1 billion.[12]

High teacher turnover also severely undermines our ability to build and sustain professional teaching communities in our schools. The high flow-through and turnover depicted in **Figure 5** has the potential to seriously undermine "a positive sense of community among families, teachers, and students that has long been held by education researchers to be one of the most important indicators and aspects of successful

schools."[13] High turnover diminishes the sense of community, continuity, and coherence that is the hallmark of strong schools.

Our inability to sustain strong learning communities in high turnover schools also undercuts our ability to implement school reforms. No price tag has yet been placed on this loss, but a substantial investment in teacher training and school reform implementation is often lost to high rates of teacher turnover. We never really build our capacity to sustain school improvements because the teachers we train leave before the reform can become established practice in the school. This is can be especially true in beleaguered schools. Despite their dreams and best aspirations, the teachers in these schools too often lack the leadership and the collegial opportunities they need to develop a strong professional community that could support their efforts to improve student achievement.

The Cost of High Turnover for Students

The most serious consequence, of course, is that high turnover diminishes teaching quality and student achievement. Inexperienced teachers (those with less than two to three years of experience) are often found to be noticeably less effective than more senior teachers.[14] In addition, concentrations of under-prepared teachers create a drain on schools' financial as well as human resources. New teachers thrown into schools with high turnover and limited opportunities for mentoring by accomplished teachers often feel "lost at sea."[15] Schools with high turnover must continually pour money into recruitment efforts and professional support for new teachers, many of them untrained, without reaping student achievement dividends from these investments. Other teachers, including the few who could serve as mentors, are stretched thin and feel overburdened by the needs of their colleagues as well as their students. Instead of using funds for needed school improvements, monies are spent re-teaching the basics each year to new teachers who come in with few tools and leave before they become skilled. Teachers who benefit from the staff-development investments of low-performing schools often end up leaving the profession or moving on to more desirable teaching positions in other communities.[16]

Not surprisingly, it is the lowest income students who suffer most from high teacher turnover and attrition. In California for example, schools with high percentages of low-income and minority students are consistently staffed with higher numbers of underprepared teachers (see **Figures 7a, 7b, and 7c**). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) recently reported that more than half of the nation's middle school students and a quarter of its high school students are learning core academic subjects from teachers who lack certification in those subjects and who did not major in them in college.[17] This pattern of out-of-field teaching is, again, particularly severe in low-income communities. Teachers in these schools are too often treated like interchangeable units who can be swapped from one teaching field to another.[18] Under these circumstances it is likely that children with the greatest learning needs will experience repeated years of teaching by unqualified instructors.

Conditions for the teachers in these schools do not support quality teaching, but it's worse for the students, because for them resignation is a no win option. They are forced to sit in classrooms with unqualified replacements and substitutes, even as their chances of achieving a quality education diminish daily. In one widely noted study, children who had the least effective teachers three years in a row posted academic achievement gains that were 54 percent lower than the gains of children who had the most effective teachers three years in a row.[19] Similar studies in Boston and Dallas have had comparable findings.[20] Says one researcher: "The implication is that not only does teaching quality matter — it matters a lot. Students unfortunate enough to face several bad teachers in a row face devastating odds against success."[21]

Taken together, at every level, the churning staff turnover in our schools has high costs. As a result, too many of our schools are riding a downward spiral that diminishes the dreams of both our teachers and their students. The way ahead is clear. We must balance our teacher preparation and recuirtment efforts with stronger efforts to retain and reward the good teachers we have. Simply replacing those who leave with short-term quick fixes serves only to keep the revolving door spinning.

HOW CAN WE REDUCE HIGH TEACHER TURNOVER?

To fix the problem we need to understand the cause. Four major factors are especially prominent influences on whether and when teachers leave specific schools or the profession entirely:

- Salaries
- Working conditions
- Preparation
- Mentoring support in the early years of teaching

Figures 8 and 9 summarize the reasons for teacher dissatisfaction and the impacts this dissatisfaction has on teacher turnover. Working conditions and salaries are both significant reasons for leaving, but the relative importance of these features varies depending on the specific teachers' experiences. For example, poor administrative supports are mentioned more often by teachers leaving low-income schools where working conditions are often more stressful, while salaries are mentioned somewhat more often by teachers leaving more affluent schools.

Salaries

There is substantial evidence that wages are at least as important to teachers in their decision to quit teaching as they are to workers in other occupations.[22] Teachers are more likely to quit when they work in districts with lower wages and when their salaries are low relative to alternative wage opportunities.[23] The effects of wage differentials are strongest at the start of the teaching career,[24] but the effects of wages on retention persist at higher levels of experience as well. Teachers in high demand fields like mathematics

and science are especially vulnerable to salary differences in their decisions to remain in teaching.[25] Such fields have especially high opportunity costs for remaining in teaching given much higher salaries in alternative occupations, and as **Figure 6** shows, the attrition rates in these fields are significantly higher than in other fields.

Higher salaries also appear to attract better-prepared and higher-quality teachers.[26] Student achievement may be associated with increases in teacher salaries as well (along with teacher experience and education, which are rewarded in teacher salary schedules).[27]

Working Conditions

Working conditions, including professional teaching conditions, play a substantial role in decisions to leave teaching in a particular school or district, and they contribute to decisions to leave the profession altogether. National survey data show that teachers' plans to remain in teaching are highly sensitive to their perceptions of their working conditions. The proportion of teachers who report that they plan to remain in teaching as long as they are able are strongly associated with how teachers feel about the administrative support, resources, and teacher voice and influence over policy in their schools[28]

There are large differences in working conditions that affect teachers in high- and low-wealth schools. Teachers in more advantaged communities experience much easier working conditions, including smaller class sizes and pupil loads, and much more control over decision making in their schools.[29]

Some studies have found that teacher attrition seems related to the demographic characteristics of schools' student populations: specifically, that teachers transfer out of high-minority schools into schools with fewer minority students. [30] But other data suggest that much of this flight is due to the difficulties posed by the kinds of working conditions that often pertain in high-minority, low-income schools. For example, a California survey found that teachers in high-minority, low-income schools report significantly worse working conditions – including poorer facilities, less availability of textbooks and supplies, fewer administrative supports, and larger class sizes, and that teachers are significantly more likely to say they plan to leave a school soon because of these poor working conditions.[31] A subsequent analysis of these data confirmed that turnover problems are more strongly influenced by school working conditions and salary levels than by student characteristics in these schools.[32]

Teacher Preparation

Several lines of research suggest that better prepared teachers stay in teaching at higher rates. For example, those who complete well designed five-year and four-year teacher education programs stay in teaching at much higher rates than teachers hired through alternatives that offer only a few weeks of training before recruits are left on their own in the classroom.[33] These differences are so large that, taking into account the costs to states, universities, and school districts of preparation, recruitment, induction, and replacement due to attrition, the actual cost of preparing a career teacher in the more

intensive programs is likely to be significantly less than that of preparing a greater number of teachers in shorter-term programs who are less likely to stay. (see **Figure 10**)

There are a number of alternative pathways for mid-career recruits that are high-quality post-baccalaureate programs tailored to help candidates meet the same high standards as other recruits; they streamline preparation by interweaving coursework about learning and teaching with a well-supported clinical training experience. These successful alternatives, including some high-quality internship models in California school districts such as New Haven and Elk Grove, and mid-career training programs like Project Promise in Colorado and George Washington University's DELTA program, typically have retention rates of 80% or higher.

But alternative approaches that bypass the student teaching and mentoring that enable recruits to learn from skilled veterans, and approaches that do not adequately support learning about methods for teaching challenging content to diverse learners, typically breed a sense of failure in their recruits. Lack of adequate preparation leads to discouragement and teacher burnout. An approach to recruitment that emphasizes ease of entry over quality preparation can be penny wise and pound-foolish. It contributes to the revolving door of teachers into and out of teaching, and undermines a school's ability to sustain a stable teaching force.

New data confirm that there are large differences in plans to stay in teaching among first year teachers who felt well-prepared and those who felt poorly prepared in the key tasks of teaching when they entered the classroom. For example, nearly two-thirds of those who felt well-prepared to design lessons, use a range of instructional methods, and assess students said they plan to stay in teaching as long as possible, while little over a third of those who felt poorly prepared in these areas said they are committed to staying.[34] (see **Figure 11**)

Beginning Teacher Mentoring

There is also clear evidence that beginning teachers who have access to intensive mentoring by expert colleagues are much less likely to leave teaching in the early years. A number of school districts, including Cincinnati, Columbus, and Toledo Ohio, and Rochester, New York have reduced attrition rates of beginning teachers by more than two-thirds (often from levels exceeding 30% to rates of under 5%), by providing expert mentors with release time to coach beginners in their first year on the job.[35] These young teachers not only stay in the profession at higher rates, but they become competent more quickly than those who must learn by trial and error.

Effective teacher induction programs pair new teachers with a more experienced mentor who provides support and assistance to help novices navigate the difficult early years of teaching as they perfect their teaching skills. Well-designed induction programs have proven their value in reducing attrition rates among new teachers.[36] Over a five year period, for example, California's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (BTSA) successfully reduced teacher attrition rates, among its participants by two-thirds.

The BTSA program encourages local school districts, county offices of education, and colleges and universities to collaborate in providing new teacher induction programs. These programs reported collective retention rates of 96 percent for first-year teachers; over five years, the program reduced the attrition rate to just 9 percent in contrast to 37 percent for new teachers who did not participate in such programs.[37]

Mentoring strategies to improve teacher retention and enhance teaching quality help boost student achievement. Connecticut's Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) program, for example, which provides each new teacher with state-trained mentors during the first two years of teaching, has contributed to the state's consistently high performance on NAEP assessments.

But the quality of teacher mentorship programs varies widely. In 2001, a total of 28 states reported that they have some form of mentoring program for new teachers, but only 10 states require mentoring programs and support the requirement with funding. As a result, not all teachers who participate in induction programs actually receive mentoring from a skilled veteran who has released time to coach them in the classroom.

WE NEED SCHOOLS DESIGNED FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

High rates of attrition, and the reasons teachers give for leaving, speak to a problem that has deep roots. The plain fact is that in too many cases our schools are not designed to support today's education goals. We are sending our children to factory-era schools to prepare them for life and work in a digital age. In this, the most rapidly changing era of human history, we continue to expect our children—and their teachers—to succeed in schools that were designed to operate on a 19th century agricultural schedule, while using teaching and learning approaches suited to the needs of an industrial economy. The industrial age has been surpassed in every major realm of American society except education. Our teachers are walking away from the large, impersonal bureaucracies that our schools have become.

It is vitally important to understand that a knowledge-based economy and a pluralistic society create new expectations for teaching. "To help diverse learners master much more challenging content, today's teachers must go far beyond dispensing information, giving a test, and assigning a grade."[38] To help each child prepare for successful employment and productive citizenship in the 21st century, all teachers must know their subject areas deeply, understand how children learn and be able to use that knowledge to teach well, use modern learning technologies effectively, and work closely with their colleagues to create rich learning environments.

The era of solo teaching in isolated classrooms is over. Good teaching thrives in a supportive learning environment created by teachers and school leaders working together to improve learning—in short, to support quality teaching our schools must support strong professional learning communities. These communities can no longer be considered utopian; they must become the building blocks of a new foundation for

America's schools. Collegial interchange, not isolation, must become the norm for teachers,. If we want professional educators in our schools, we must turn our schools into professional workplaces.

A THREE PART STRATEGY

To address high teacher attrition rates, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future will work with its 21state partners to pursue a three part strategy:

- First, we must organize every school for teaching and learning success. This is the Commission's highest priority. We can do this by downsizing schools and reorganizing them to support strong learning communities.

- Second, we must ensure that the teacher preparation system meets both the teaching requirements of our schools and the learning needs of students. It is time to abandon the futile debate over "Alternative" vs. "Traditional" teacher preparation. Since all routes to teaching lead to the front of the classroom, all teacher preparation programs must set and meet high standards. Short-term, quick-fix approaches to placing teachers in the classroom, fuel high teacher attrition rates, and diminish teaching quality.

- Third, we must develop and sustain professionally rewarding career paths for teachers, from induction through accomplished teaching. School systems should eliminate antiquated hiring hurdles; they should establish and support mentoring programs for new teachers, and they should develop clear and rewarding career paths to accomplished teaching.

As a benchmark for progress, we should pledge to improve teacher retention by thirty percent by 2006. The Commission calls on states, school systems, unions, school boards, and business leaders to join us in working toward this objective; rewarding schools and districts that achieve it, and creating incentives for those working toward this goal.

NCTAF STATE PARTNERS

In 1996, the Commission offered a set of interconnected strategies intended to guide the work of educational leaders seeking to ensure that every child would have access to quality teaching by 2006, which it published in: *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*. We advocated high standards for entry into the teaching profession, and to support professionaliztion we called for the creation of independent standards boards in every state. We called for a redesign of teacher preparation, and encouraged accreditation by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). We promoted improved recruitment, induction, and retention policies. We encouraged states to support the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

We advocated for increased teacher pay, and we called for the redesign of schools for teacher and student success.

Where Progress is being made on these initiatives it is because state leaders have made significant, sustained commitments to teacher quality improvement that enable them to pursue several of these strategies in tandem. To support this work, the Commission has formed a state partnership network to strengthen the efforts of states around the country that are working to improve teaching quality. The Commission currently has 20 partner states, that include: Alabama, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Vermont, West Virginia, and Washington. Iowa is in the process of becoming the twenty first partner.

State partner initiatives have focused on a wide range of strategies to improve teaching quality. For example, partner states have worked to:

- improve teacher qualifications in low- and high-performing schools;
- reduce the extent of out-of-field teaching;
- increase new teachers' access to mentors;
- improve the funding of teacher education relative to that of other professional preparation programs that require clinical training;
- improve professional development and its impact on quality teaching;
- strengthen teacher preparation and licensure standards;
- use of National Board standards as a benchmark for performance;
- improve teacher compensation; and establish incentives for school redesign that supports teacher and student learning.

The growth in the number of National Board Certified Teachers As can be taken as an indicator of progress on these initiatives the Commission has used. **Figures 12 and 13** show, that there has been a dramatic increase in Board Certified teachers in all states, but in the Commission's partner states that increase has been almost twice the increase in all other states. We believe that this because the Commission's partner states have been implementing a constellation of teacher quality improvement initiatives that creates a climate in which quality teaching can thrive.

At our meeting on August 20-22, in Washington DC, the Commission will work with its state partner representatives to focus our efforts on the three part strategy of: designing schools for success, supporting high quality teacher preparation, and developing rewarding career paths in teaching. The results of our work will be released in a report later this fall.

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